

## NEXT-OF-KIN

FROM PAGE B1

that her son was dead. When Stephen Burge died in Pickaway County in 2007, Wuestenberg was notified seven hours later. Both women said they would have rushed to the hospital to say their good-byes if they had known of the wrecks sooner.

In many cases, victims' identifications aren't adequate to lead police or nurses to their loved ones, authorities say.

While Wiant is happy with the program's success, she isn't resting. She has paid hundreds of dollars for four billboards to promote the service in Union and Franklin counties. Lamar Advertising picked up the lease costs, \$4,000 for 30 days.

Wuestenberg hit the speaking circuit to educate the public and sign up people.

"I am extremely disappointed with that number," said Wuestenberg, who had envisioned at least 500,000 participants by the six-month mark.

Nondrivers can sign up, she said. A state identification card is all that is needed. The information can be tapped into for Amber Alerts or missing Alzheimer's patients, she said.

Because they face the grim task of notifying relatives, police agencies were quick to embrace the program.

Campaign County Sheriff Brent Emmons personally contacts about 10 families a year in the county of 39,000 residents 30 miles west of Columbus.

"I want to make sure there's somebody who can be there for them," he said. "The last thing they want to do is have to deal with it when they're alone."

The state spent \$60,000 to create the database, but there are no ongoing costs.

Ohio Safety Director Henry Guzman is pleased with the results. "Obviously, as this grows by word of mouth and by working with the advocates, it's going to grow."

## 100,000 registered on next-of-kin database

Police can use info to contact relatives in case of emergency

By Dean Narciso  
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Seven months after its launch, a state database has attracted more than 100,000 people who want their loved ones contacted quickly in an emergency.

The free next-of-kin database includes names, ages and at least one family contact for law-enforcement use only. While 100,000 registrants seems like a lot, backers of the program are far from satisfied.

Carmela Wiant of Mechanicsburg in Champaign County and Linda Wuestenberg of Westerville both learned of their sons' car-crash deaths in a manner they call delayed, inappropriate and shocking.

When David Money died in 2006, Wiant was told by his fiancée about the wreck on I-270 and called the hospital to check on his condition. Her call was transferred to a chaplain who told her over the phone



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Carmela Wiant doesn't want anyone to learn about a loved one's death the way she did — hours later and by phone. She has paid for billboards promoting the state's next-of-kin notification database.

See **NEXT-OF-KIN** Page **B2**